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Rare Thrill for Tass: Joshing Over U.F.O. Report

By ELEANOR BLAU

The report by the Soviet press agency Tass that lanky, three-eyed creatures took a stroll through a Soviet park last month has caused such reverberations in the United States that they have bounced back to Tass itself.

The agency reported Tuesday that major American television networks and newspapers, which it said typically avoid stories about unidentified flying objects, "played up the space adventure, frequently poking fun and suggesting that the beings from outer space might be a result of overzealous glasnost."

The Tass report, written by an American working for the agency, did not sound resentful. It quoted Edwin Diamond, a New York Magazine media critic, who criticized what he called the story's shallowness, saying, "What did the Academy of Science think?" and "Where are the pictures?"

And it quoted Yervant Turzian of the Cornell University Astronomy Department, who said fellow academics regarded the story as a joke.

Drawing of Creature Is Broadcast

"Given the physical parameters of the universe, the possibility of life on other planets is high," he told Tass. "But the vast majority of these reports can be explained by such logical phenomena as unconventional aircraft in the sky or artificial satellites."

On the other hand, Tass found that "A Current Affair," the syndicated news and entertainment show, was taking the report seriously enough to plan on sending a film crew to Voronezh. That is where Tass originally reported that three children had said they saw aliens emerge from a ball, wearing silvery overalls.

Last night, Soviet television viewers saw a picture of one of the creatures on the main nightly news program "Vremya," in the form of a scribbled drawing by one of the children. It showed a smiling stick figure inside a glowing two-legged sphere.

Vremya sounded more skeptical than the original Tass report, but it offered without comment an interview with Vasya Surin, one of the purported witnesses.

'He Didn't Have a Head'

"We were scared," said Vasya, who appeared to be about 11. "It hovered over this tree. Then the door opened and a tall person of about three meters looked out. He didn't have a head, or shoulders either. He just had a kind of hump. There he had three eyes, two on each side and one in the middle."

Vasya said the alien had two holes instead of a nose, and could not turn its head, so it had to swivel its middle eye.

But "Vremya" cast some doubt on the reports of the sighting, noting, for instance, that

there were no adult witnesses, even though a large apartment house overlooked the site.

Since the first U.F.O. sightings in the 1940's, spaceships have been described as sausages, cigars, balls, bananas, crescents, round straw hats, eggs, mushrooms, disks and, especially saucers. But, in the 1980's "Saucers are out; boomerangs are in," said Jim Speiser, a computer expert in Scottsdale, Ariz. He founded a national U.F.O. computer network in 1986 because he thought there should be an exchange of information instead of disputes among people who reacted variously to U.F.O. stories, "from skeptics to wild-eyed gee-whiz believers."

In a telephone interview, Mr. Speiser said of the reported Soviet sighting: "I think Tass is exploring its new freedom and is not used to self-censorship. I don't disbelieve, but we have much better stories in this country."

Also surprised — but only because he thinks the media ignores U.F.O. reports — is Tim Beckley of Inner Light Publications. He edits U.F.O. Universe, a glossy magazine that prints 100,000 copies six times a year and distributes them internationally.

Mr. Beckley said that he is a journalist, not a scientist, and that he is almost as puzzled about U.F.O.'s now as he was when he saw his first in 1957, as a 10-year-old in New Brunswick, N.J. "It's kind of a cosmic game those entities seem to be playing with us," he said.

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Scribbled spacemen debut on Soviet evening news

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSCOW — Soviet TV viewers Wednesday night got a chance to see the aliens that created a cosmic sensation with their reported landing in the town of Voronezh — but only in a child's scribbled drawing.

The Soviet nightly news program Vremya broadcast a report from Voronezh showing the spot among yellow-leaved birches where, according to the official news agency Tass, scientists confirmed an unearthly craft had touched down.

The picture, by a child who claimed to have witnessed the landing, showed a glowing two-legged sphere with a smiling stick figure inside.

Tass, which has now assigned three reporters to dig into the story, made a worldwide splash Monday with its straight-faced report on towering, pin-headed aliens who

emerged from a spaceship that landed in a park in Voronezh, 300 miles southeast of Moscow. Since then, scientists have discounted the report and attributed it to rising sensationalism in the Soviet press under glasnost.

The Vremya report, although more skeptical in tone than that by Tass, offered without comment an interview with schoolboy Vasya Surin, a purported witness to the "close encounter."

"We were scared," said Vasya, who appeared to be about 11. "It hovered over this tree. Then the door opened and a tall person of about three meters (nine feet) looked out. He didn't have a head, or shoulders either. He just had a

kind of hump. There he had three eyes, two on each side and one in the middle."

Vasya said the alien had two holes instead of a real nose, and could not turn his head, so he had to swivel his middle eye.

An aviation engineer from a nearby factory said he measured the landing area and found an intense magnetic field there.

But the "Vremya" report concluded with some of the many factors that detract from the credibility of the sighting:

□ No adult witnesses could be found even though a large apartment house overlooked the site.

□ The story spread only a week after the supposed event when an article appeared in the local newspaper.

□ Supposed alien minerals turned out to be of the earthly type.

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Soviet 'close encounter' offers more questions than answers to reporter

By DAVID LJUNGGREN
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VORONEZH, Soviet Union — An entire city in central Russia is spellbound by reports of giant aliens making a downtown visit — but as a Westerner, I had no Close Encounter of a Soviet Kind.

They came from outer space, three-eyed monsters landing from a shining ball-like craft, that's what everyone says.

Feverish excitement about UFOs is sweeping Voronezh, an industrial city of 900,000 people, about 300 miles southeast of the Soviet capital.

Soviet scientists agree that something strange did happen in a local park on the night of Sept. 27.

But after a week of sensational stories of alien landings and a creature with a magic pistol, that

seemed to be about the only thing they could say for sure.

The site draws awed crowds, including many who seem to know someone who saw trigger-happy aliens come to Earth and fire at a local teen-ager.

But on a mission from Moscow I found no convincing clues.

The mysterious visitors could have chosen a more scenic location for an extraterrestrial display.

The spot where bug-eyed creatures are reported to have stepped out of a glowing ball is the kind of blighted urban patch common to most cities around the world.

According to reports, one of the aliens, silver-suited and accompanied by a robot, strolled through the park before firing an unusually large gun at a 16-year-

old boy, who temporarily vanished. He reappeared when the spacecraft left.

"I am a skeptic," said engineer Yuri Belyanov outside the plot of wasteland where the children said they saw the ball disgorge the pistol-packing, three-eyed monster.

"But I don't believe that so many people can be wrong. How can anyone make a mistake about a glowing ball coming out of the sky?"

Rumors constantly sweep through this city best known for its aircraft and chemical industries. Few dismiss the reports outright although some are clearly

hedging their bets.

Some reports have spoken of "humanoids" spotted in rural areas. According to one particularly dramatic account, a man spoke with a group of glowing aliens in the Ural mountains city of Perm.

On Friday I met a group of citizens huddled around the waste ground dotted with birch trees where a pattern of eight-inch deep holes is supposed to mark the area where the three-eyed alien fired a pistol at the youth.

No one there actually claimed to have seen the landing in an area behind typical, gray Soviet high-rise apartment buildings. But almost everyone knew someone who had.

A scientist in the town investigating the reported sighting said the children should be believed. "We measured the landing site and recorded unbelievably high levels of magnetism," said Genrikh Silanov, head of the Voronezh Geophysical Laboratory. "It's obvious something did happen."

"I am a skeptic. But I don't believe that so many people can be wrong. How can anyone make a mistake about a glowing ball coming out of the sky?"

— Yuri Belyanov, engineer

Soviet alien report latest official tall tale

REUTER NEWS SERVICE

MOSCOW — They came from Planet Red Star. But when a Soviet reporter asked the extraterrestrials to take him home with them, the answer was negative.

"There would be no return for you and it would be dangerous for us. . . . You would bring thought bacteria," reporter Pavel Mukhortov says the glowing creatures told him during their encounter in the Ural Mountains.

Mukhortov's report on what he called the first encounter between earthlings and aliens was published in Komsomolskaya Pravda. It was the latest in a series of fantastic accounts in the official Soviet media concerning the appearance of three-eyed aliens armed with ray guns, a dancing robot, and other spacemen.

They have been reported in deadpan style and many people in a country with a traditional fascination for the bizarre and supernatural say they believe them. At the very least the tales are providing relief from the shortages of goods, bad news about the economy, and ethnic unrest afflicting the Soviet Union.

Mukhortov said he met the creatures near Perm on the night of July 30. They were about six to 13

feet tall and glowed and chatted from a distance of 1,000 feet, he said.

Or not exactly chatted. Mukhortov said he simply thought his questions to the aliens and the answers appeared before him in the form of illuminated letters.

Komsomolskaya Pravda did not say in which language they communicated but said the exchange went like this:

Mukhortov: "Where are you from?"

Aliens: "The constellation Libra, Red Star — our homeland."

"Your goal?"

"It depends on the center. We are directed by a central system."

"Can you take me to your planet?"

"There would be no return for you and it would be dangerous for us."

"Why would it be dangerous?"

"You would bring thought bacteria."

Komsomolskaya Pravda also reported other sightings of unidentified flying objects near Perm, an industrial city notorious for a labor camp located there.

It said that on July 16, workers at a collective farm saw a group of huge black headless people, moving as if on a motorbike.

A-2 /The Houston Post/Tuesday, August 29, 1989

■ EARTH'S MESSAGE

IF ALIEN creatures ever discover Voyager 2 as it speeds toward the stars, they will find it carries a recording of Earth's sounds, including rock 'n' roll legend **Chuck Berry's** "Johnny B. Goode." "I could never be gratified more than being part of that," Berry said Sunday night after he belted out his classic song for a crowd of 1,500 at a

party outside NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif. Berry changed the words a bit, replacing "Go, Johnny, go!" with "Go, Voyager, go!" The party — sponsored by The Planetary Society and televised in the United States, Japan and Soviet Union — was a celebration of Voyager 2's flight past Neptune.